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The Book of Mormon—Introductory

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Lesson Department

Theology and Testimony

(First Week in October)

THE BOOK OF MORMON—INTRODUCTORY

PREFATORY NOTES

There are nine lessons in this course. They are chiefly the teachings of the *Book of Mormon*. The purpose of the course is not primarily to learn the doctrines of that volume, although these should be known, but rather to find out what bearing they have on the divine origin of the Nephite Record and the mission of the Prophet Joseph Smith. With this in mind, some attention has been given to the religious ideas that were in the air at the time he was translating the book.

Instead of giving a large number of references for the class to look up, it has been deemed better to make quotations in the body of the lessons. This will no doubt lessen the time for preparation and conduce to better classes. The only disadvantage is that it takes up space in the *Magazine* that heretofore has been given to other uses.

These lessons are by no means exhaustive. There are many points that are not even touched upon here. Space and time are too limited to cover everything doctrinal in the Record. The class should, therefore, make use of the work they were asked to do during the previous two years in setting down, under separate headings, the teachings of the *Book of Mormon*. And this record should be made use of here. It will supplement what is said in these lessons.

A greater number of questions are given this year than the last two

years. The reason is that we have hoped to cover some points in the questions that there was not space for in the body of the lesson. It is our belief that these will help to broaden the scope of the course. We have aimed, also, in these questions to make the work apply more closely to the present.

Select Readings: Read the Book of Ether, chapters 2 to 6 and chapters 11, 12, 13. Make a note of the doctrines taught.

INTRODUCTORY

Is there another life, and, if there is, how are we to know it for certain?

No question is older than that.

When the first man went away without his body and did not come back, but left it on the ground or in the rude bed, cold and dank, those who were left behind and who had loved him and were sad because he was gone must have wondered and asked one another whether they would ever see him again, and if so, where, and when, and under what circumstances.

And no question is more insistently asked today.

Every one who thinks at all asks it, whether he lives in the frozen north, or at the equator under the broiling sun, or in the temperate zones where life can be lived more comfortably. They ask it as passionately who live in the luxury of the palace, where there is plenty and ease, as do those who occupy the hovel, amid want and suffering. And

all down the ages since that first one died men of every clime and class have turned their eyes toward the "bourne whence no one returns" to take up again his way of life.

And what answers have these received to their question about death and the great Beyond?

First of all, they have racked their brains to find an answer to this question in their own heads—have tried, that is, to reason their way to an answer that is satisfactory.

"All men everywhere," they have said to themselves, "believe in immortality, no matter where they live, or when, or how, and therefore there *must* be another life after this." And for hundreds of years this "argument," as it was called, was thought one of the "proofs" of immortality.

But now we know better. Now we realize that it is not true, because it is not based on a fact. All men do *not* believe in another life. The millions of East Indians do not—at least, not in our sense. When a Christian says he believes in the next world, he is thinking that there he will exist as an individual consciousness, a being capable of thinking and feeling and willing. But when a Buddhist says he believes in another life, he is not thinking of that at all, but of something very different. He is thinking of the time when his individuality will be absorbed by the all-consciousness, the great Nervana.

Besides, an American professor discovered through a questionnaire that a great many people in this nation—university students as well as some great scholars—do not believe in individual immortality. Many of them, in fact, do not even desire individual immortality, as he also found. To them the other world is a matter of utter indifference. That is what they would have us believe, at any rate. And most

likely if an inquiry were set on foot, there would be found people in every other country of the same mind.

Hence, an argument based on the notion that there must be another life after this because everybody believes in one, breaks down when it is examined closely.

And then, too, people have argued that there must be another life for the reason that we do not get justice in this world. The wicked flourish, we are told, while the righteous are crushed and unhappy.

What about that "argument"?

Well, it just isn't true—that is all. The wicked do *not* prosper here in the true sense of the word, nor are the righteous miserable. No doubt some wicked men become rich through their greed and chicanery; and no doubt some very good people are poor. But money is not the real standard of measuring values, although it often appears to be. There is the higher value of individual worth. Every hour and every minute we are paid for what we do in this world. We do not have to wait for another world in which to obtain our reward and our punishment for the deeds done in the body. "The ledger of the Almighty," as Professor Huxley used to say, "is strictly kept, and every one of us has the balance of his operations paid over to him at the end of every minute of his existence. The gravitation of sin to sorrow is as certain as that of the earth to the sun—and more so."

So the argument that there is another life because in this world people do not get their just deserts, falls to the ground for want of support.

And then, finally—not to exhaust the list of "arguments drawn from reason"—there is the one called "moral perfection." It runs something like this: Man is a moral being. Apparently he is capable of

progressing morally and spiritually almost without limit. But no sooner does he enter upon the road to perfection than he dies with this promise unfulfilled. Hence there must be a sphere beyond the grave where this capacity for moral perfection is satisfied. For God would not put something into your hand only to snatch it away when you were about to use it.

Of the three reasons for believing in the immortality of the soul, this is the only one that appeals to the modern mind as having any basis in truth, and the more we consider it the more it appeals. But it does not have the weight that is necessary to convince—else every one would be converted to the Christian belief in immortality. So mankind has had to look somewhere else than to a human deduction for evidence that there is a life after this.

That evidence is found in the resurrection of our Savior, as given in the *New Testament*.

Jesus, to all appearance, was a man. He grew up in the village of Nazareth a carpenter. He lived with other men. He ate their food, slept in their beds, and dressed as they did. He became a great teacher, and had a large following.

Then he was murdered by jealous contemporaries. His body was placed in a sepulchre, after the manner of his time and country. And a Roman guard was set to watch the tomb, because he had told his disciples that he would rise from the dead on the third day. And those disciples declared that he did rise from the dead, that he appeared to them on various occasions, and that they conversed and ate with him. Nor was that all. An institution was founded on this fact of his resurrection, which has continued for more than nineteen centuries.

Reduced to its ultimate, the fact of Christ's resurrection rests on the testimony of Paul, the apostle, who did not see Jesus till after the ascension. In his letter to the Corinthians he says:

"I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received—how that Christ died for our sins; that he was buried; that he rose again the third day; that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve; that he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain unto this day, but some are fallen asleep; that afterwards he was seen of James, then of all the apostles; and that, last of all, he was seen of me, as of one born out of due time."

Many attempts have been made, especially in our own era, to break down this testimony of Paul's. Holsten, for instance, tried to show that Paul's vision was an hallucination; Pfeiderer, that he made it up, for his theory of "counter-tendencies" amounts to that; and Renan, that it was the result of a physical disability in the apostle. And a Protestant bishop in England attributes the vision to an epileptic fit. All these critics resort to these hypotheses, however, only because of an obsession against the miraculous element in religion.

But so far no effort has been successful in breaking down the force of Paul's testimony to the resurrection of Christ. And so, with Bauer, who also was unfriendly to the miraculous, we are compelled to admit that the conversion of Saul of Tarsus "resists all historical, logical, and psychological analysis." This is because it is bed-rocked in an experience, not in a course of reasoning.

This testimony of Paul's, of course, is strongly bulwarked by the fact of Christianity itself. For no institution could influence for good the lives of countless millions of men

and women, let alone have altered the entire course of history and shaped the destiny of strong men and nations as the religion of Jesus has done, unless there were at the heart of it somewhere a deep, elemental truth. And, say what you will, the core of the Christian religion as established by Jesus and his apostles, is the resurrection of Christ. Thus the faith of millions of intelligent people throughout the world and for many centuries, rests upon the validity of a miracle.

"Sir," said old Boswell to Johnson, "the evidences of a future life are sufficient." And the great literary dictator replied in his gruff manner, "Sir, I could wish for more."

If the evidences of a future life were sufficient, as Boswell thought, how is it then that the whole world has not been converted? Boswell would have had a hard time explaining that. But Johnson was right. There is a need for more evidence that there is a future life.

But where are we to look for such evidence? Not to human reasoning. That source, it seems, has long been exhausted. Not to the New Testament, for every nook and cranny of that volume has been critically inspected. Indeed, the more that source is looked into, the more doubt is thrown upon the possibility of the resurrection from the dead. The only bit of evidence that remains from that source, as already stated, is the testimony of Paul.

Our only hope, therefore, for any new evidence of the reality of a life after this lies in the expectation that God may grant us further light on that greatest of all questions through new revelation.

That light has been given man.

Joseph Smith, the prophet of the nineteenth century, claimed to have seen a resurrected man, not once

only, but many times. This personage, he further declares, conversed with him for hours at a time. Moreover, he instructed him in his work as prophet and seer in this dispensation. Finally, this heavenly being placed in his hands a book of gold plates on which was written, in an ancient language, the history of an extinct race, the ancestors of the American Indians.

Now, the evidence that Joseph Smith was telling the truth runs along two lines.

First, there is the book itself. Who wrote it, if Joseph Smith did not? No competent critic nowadays, with all the facts before him, believes that either Solomon Spaulding or Sidney Rigdon had anything to do with writing it. Besides, it is highly improbable, to say the least, that a boy without education or experience in such things, could have written such a book. And then, finally, there could have been no motive to write a book that would give him neither fame nor money. So we must accept the Prophet's own explanation of how the *Book of Mormon* originated as the only really plausible one.

Now, there are some things in the *Book of Mormon* which corroborate Joseph Smith's story. It is full of interesting characters and ideas that its author could not possibly have got from the people he knew or the conditions in Palmyra at the time. These personalities and doctrines, when we look into the matter closely, tend to show the truth of Joseph Smith's explanation of how we got the Nephite record.

Secondly, there is the testimony of the witnesses—two sets. One set testify that they saw and handled the plates from which the book was translated; the other, that they both saw the plates and the angel and

heard the voice of God on the occasion.

The divine origin of the *Book of Mormon* being thus established by its doctrines and by the testimony of witnesses, we may feel safe in saying that Joseph Smith actually saw and talked with a resurrected being—the angel Moroni. Also we may feel safe in using the contents of the work to clarify our ideas on the great question of the immortality of the soul—the world of spirits between death and the resurrection, the resurrection itself, and the conditions under which immortal beings may expect to live in the next world.

Thus the *Book of Mormon*, with

associated incidents, reflects new light on the question, Is there another life?

Questions

1. Briefly state the point that it is expected you are to keep in mind throughout this course.

2. Which of the three reasons for a belief in immortality still has weight? Why does it?

3. Give the apostle Paul's testimony to the resurrection of Christ. Why is it so invulnerable?

4. Can one person *know* anything from another's experience? What, then, is the value of others' testimony to us?

Work and Business

(Second Week in October)

Watchword: "And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house."—Luke 10:5.

Text: "Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."—Matthew 5:19.

THE Ten Commandments, given through Moses to the children of Israel, are commandments to the people of all times.

While prophets were preaching to the people on the Eastern continent, other prophets were preaching to the Nephites and Lamanites on this continent, and Christ appeared to them also, and taught them. We find in the *Book of Mormon*, III Nephi, '12:20: "Therefore come unto me and be ye saved; for verily I say unto you, that except ye shall keep my commandments, which I have commanded you at this time, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

Christ established His Church on

both continents. It was lost sight of and then again restored and established again on the earth through the latter-day prophet Joseph Smith, Through him commandments were given to his followers that are quite as binding as those enunciated anciently. He taught his people in no uncertain language their obligations concerning law observance. "We believe in being subject to kings, presidents, rulers and magistrates, in obeying, honoring and sustaining the law." Articles of Faith. No. XII.

At the present time special emphasis is being placed on the Word of Wisdom. Every Relief Society member should do her part to further this campaign. Quote the part